

City of Westminster



Comprehensive Plan



Adopted June 14, 2004



City of Westminster **Comprehensive Plan**

Adopted – June 14, 2004

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The information contained in this Plan is current as of the date of Plan adoption and approval. As the programs, policies, and procedures described herein are subject to change, the City of Westminster makes no guarantee regarding the accuracy or timeliness of the information presented.



City of Westminster Comprehensive Plan

Adopted – June 14, 2004

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction

Founding and Development of Westminster.....	1-1
History of the Comprehensive Plan.....	1-3
Visions.....	1-4

Chapter Two: Environmental Resources

Overview.....	2-1
Planning Act.....	2-1
Environmental Resources Element.....	2-3
Climate.....	2-3
Topography.....	2-4
Soils.....	2-4
Surface Hydrology.....	2-5
Geology and Subsurface Hydrology.....	2-6
Community Water Supply.....	2-6
Forested Areas.....	2-6
Sensitive Areas Definitions.....	2-7
Additional Environmental Resources.....	2-7
Significance of Environmental Resources.....	2-8
Goals and Objectives.....	2-18

Chapter Three: Population

Population Trends.....	3-1
Births & Deaths.....	3-6
Marital Status & Children.....	3-7
Place of Birth & Ancestry.....	3-9
Recent Migration.....	3-10
Education.....	3-11



City of Westminster Comprehensive Plan

Adopted – June 14, 2004

Table of Contents (cont'd)

Chapter Four: Housing

Types of Housing & Housing Density.....	4-1
Tenure of Housing.....	4-2
Condition of Housing.....	4-3
Cost of Housing.....	4-5
Current Housing Programs.....	4-9
Housing Needs.....	4-10
Goals & Objectives.....	4-13

Chapter Five: Economic Development

Business Patterns.....	5-1
Existing Economic Development Trends.....	5-4
Labor Force.....	5-6
Regulations Impacting Commercial & Industrial Uses.....	5-9
Current Economic Development Activities.....	5-10
Goals & Objectives	5-12

Chapter Six: Tourism

Tourism Patterns.....	6-1
Existing Attractions, Lodging, and Events.....	6-1
Current Tourism Programs.....	6-4
Goals & Objectives.....	6-5



City of Westminster Comprehensive Plan

Adopted – June 14, 2004

Table of Contents (cont'd)

Chapter Seven: Neighborhood Revitalization & Historic Resources

Existing Conditions.....	7-1
Revitalization Programs.....	7-4
Community Facilities Impacts.....	7-6
Impact of Development.....	7-6
Goals & Objectives.....	7-7

Chapter Eight: Land Use

Existing Development.....	8-1
Open Space.....	8-1
Vacant Land.....	8-2
Current Land Use Patterns & the Comprehensive Plan.....	8-5
Areas of Concern.....	8-6
Proposed Land Use.....	8-7
Future Population & the Land Use Plan.....	8-10
Goals & Objectives.....	8-12

Chapter Nine: Transportation

Summary of the Existing Transportation Network.....	9-1
Functional Classification.....	9-1
State Highway Facilities.....	9-2
Collector & Local Roads.....	9-5
Traffic Volumes.....	9-6
Capacity Analysis.....	9-9
Pedestrian Travel, Bicycling, and Greenways.....	9-10
Railroads & Airports.....	9-12



City of Westminster Comprehensive Plan

Adopted – June 14, 2004

Table of Contents (cont'd)

Transportation (cont'd)

Park & Ride and Ridesharing.....	9-13
Transit.....	9-14
Local Bus Service & Intermodal Connections.....	9-16
Commuting Patterns.....	9-16
Corridor Studies	
Maryland Route 140.....	9-21
Main Street.....	9-24
Corridor Descriptions	
Maryland Route 27.....	9-25
Maryland Route 97 (N).....	9-25
Proposed Major Streets.....	9-26
Goals & Objectives.....	9-28

Chapter Ten: Water & Sewer

Background & Introduction.....	10-1
Purpose.....	10-3
Goals & Objectives.....	10-5

Chapter Eleven: Community Facilities

Overview.....	11-1
Schools & Colleges.....	11-1
Child Care.....	11-2
Libraries.....	11-3
Facilities for Senior Citizens.....	11-3
Public Safety and Emergency Services.....	11-4
Communications Facilities.....	11-4
Government Facilities.....	11-4



City of Westminster Comprehensive Plan

Adopted – June 14, 2004

Table of Contents (cont'd)

Community Facilities (cont'd)

Recreation.....	11-5
Cultural Facilities.....	11-6
Solid Waste Disposal Service.....	11-7
Goals & Objectives.....	11-10

Chapter Twelve: Growth Management

Existing Mechanisms for Growth Management.....	12-1
Goals & Objectives.....	12-4

Chapter Thirteen: Interjurisdictional Coordination

Existing Interjurisdictional Coordination.....	13-1
Goals & Objectives.....	13-3

Chapter Fourteen: Plan Implementation

Current Regulations.....	14-1
Issues & Concerns with the Zoning Ordinance.....	14-2
List of Recommended Actions.....	14-3
Funding Mechanisms & Additional Actions.....	14-41



City of Westminster Comprehensive Plan

Revised Draft – June 11, 2004

List of Tables

T2.1	Current and Historical Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Species of Carroll County, Maryland	2-12
T3.1	Population Change, 1970 – 2000.....	3-1
T3.2	Population by Age & Sex, 2000.....	3-2
T3.3	Population by Age & Race, 2000.....	3-4
T3.4	Population Projections, 2005 – 2025.....	3-5
T3.5	Birth Death Rates, Carroll County, 1995 – 2000.....	3-6
T3.6	Infant Mortality in the Baltimore Metro Area, 2001.....	3-7
T3.7	Marital Status by Sex, 2000.....	3-7
T3.8	Household Type by Race, 2000.....	3-8
T3.9	Birthplace of City Residents, 2000.....	3-9
T3.10	Language Spoken at Home, 2000.....	3-9
T3.11	Place of Residents in 1995 for City Residents in 2000.....	3-10
T3.12	Educational Attainment.....	3-11
T3.13	Graduation Rates in the Baltimore Metro Area, 2000 – 2003..	3-12
T3.14	Graduation Rates for Carroll County Public High Schools.....	3-12
T4.1	Housing Units by Tenure, 2000.....	4-2
T4.2	Persons per Housing Unit, 2000.....	4-3
T4.3	Tenure by Age of Householder, 2000.....	4-4
T4.4	Year Residential Structure Built.....	4-4
T4.5	Heating Fuel for Occupied Housing Units, 2000.....	4-5
T4.6	Value of Owner Occupied Units, 2000.....	4-6
T4.7	Selected Monthly Homeownership Costs as a Percentage of Household Income, 1999.....	4-7
T4.8	Gross Rent of Renter Occupied Units.....	4-8
T4.9	Gross Rent as a Percentage of Household Income, 1999.....	4-9



City of Westminster Comprehensive Plan

Revised Draft – June 11, 2004

List of Tables (cont'd)

T5.1	Westminster Area Business Patterns, 2000 – 2001.....	5-3
T5.2	Major Employers in Carroll County, 2002.....	5-4
T5.3	Employment Status, 2000.....	5-7
T5.4	Class of Worker, 2000.....	5-7
T5.5	Employed Persons by Industry, 2000.....	5-8
T5.6	Household Income, 2000.....	5-9
T8.1	Vacant Properties by Proposed Land Use, 2004.....	8-3
T8.2	Land Use Designations, 2004 Land Use Map.....	8-11
T8.3	Estimated Available Residential Capacity.....	8-12
T9.1	Changes in Average Daily Traffic, 1999 – 2003.....	9-6
T9.2	Changes in ADT, 1999 – 2003 (Maryland Route 140).....	9-7
T9.3	Park & Ride Lots in Carroll County.....	9-14
T9.4	Travel Time to Work, 2000.....	9-17
T9.5	Travel Time to Work, All County Residents, 2000.....	9-17
T9.6	Means of Transportation to Work, 2000.....	9-18
T9.7	County of Employment for Carroll County Residents, 2002....	9-19
T9.8	Destination of Commuting within Carroll County, 2002.....	9-20
T10.1	Westminster Area Water Demand, 1995 – 2025.....	10-5
T11.1	City of Westminster Parks.....	11-8



City of Westminster Comprehensive Plan

Revised Draft – June 11, 2004

List of Figures

F3.1	Population Pyramid, 2000.....	3-3
F3.2	Projected Population Pyramid, 2025.....	3-3
F8.1	Vacant Land by Land Use, 2004.....	8-2

List of Maps

M7.1	National Register District.....	7-3
M8.1	Opportunities for Redevelopment in Downtown Westminster.	8-6
M8.2	Land Use Map, 2004.....	8-7
M9.1	Functional Classification.....	9-3
M9.2	SHA Traffic Count Observation Points with 2002 Counts.....	9-8
M9.3	County of Employment for Carroll County Residents, 2002....	9-19

Chapter One

Introduction

Founding and Development of Westminster

Beautiful countryside, clean air, abundant water, healthy climate, quality schools, industrious work force, and easy accessibility to Baltimore. These are some of the reasons that people were attracted to the City of Westminster as a place for conducting business, establishing a residence, and vacationing in 1887. Although the City of Westminster is no longer the resort it was in the late 1800s, people are still drawn to Westminster for many of the same reasons today.

The first lots in Westminster were laid out by William Winchester in 1764. There was no particular reason for locating a town where East Main Street and North Church Street intersect today. There were no major, pre-existing crossroads in the area and no navigable waters, often important factors in the founding and growth of a city. Winchester simply created and sold the lots along the road to Baltimore, a pattern that was repeated on present day Main Street by other landowners.

With no real driving force for growth in Westminster, the population increased slowly. Scotch-Irish and Palatinate Germans and Swiss moved to the area from Pennsylvania, and English and Scotch-Irish came from the Maryland tidewater areas to the south. These residents soon took an active role in the growth of Westminster.

The first major instance of growth in Westminster resulted from the Baltimore and Reisterstown Turnpike, built through Carroll County in 1807 to facilitate trading between Baltimore and Pittsburgh. This turnpike was built through Westminster only after considerable lobbying by Westminster residents.

Westminster quickly developed into a transportation center as a result of the turnpike. Conestoga wagons and mule drivers constantly passed through the town, and a horse drawn bus line provided passenger service between Westminster and nearby towns. Numerous businesses opened along Main Street to serve the travelers and the town's increasing population.

The creation of Carroll County and the designation of Westminster as the county seat also helped to spur growth. This occurrence was once again the result of the lobbying efforts of the residents in Westminster and the surrounding areas. Westminster was originally located near the boundary separating Frederick and Baltimore Counties, and residents were forced to travel long distances to carry out any legal business. As a result, area residents repeatedly petitioned the Maryland General Assembly to create a new county centered on Westminster. A number of these petitions failed until Carroll County was finally created in 1837. The biggest champion of the creation of this new county was John Longwell, who established the *Carrolltonian*, a newspaper devoted to supporting of the creation of Carroll County.

The designation of Westminster as County Seat resulted in the construction of a number of public and civic buildings. The County Jail was constructed in 1837 and the Court House was completed in 1838. In addition, religious denominations began to construct churches, and in 1846 Ascension Episcopal church became the first English church built in Westminster. The Order of Odd Fellows took part as well by constructing an Opera House for the entertainment of residents and visitors in Westminster.

Shortly after the creation of Carroll County, Westminster was incorporated as a town by chapter 418 of the Acts of 1838, under the name of the Burgess and Commissioners of Westminster. That charter was amended by chapter 335 of the Acts of 1856, which characterized the municipality as a city by changing the name to “The Mayor and Common Council of Westminster.” Westminster became the county seat of Carroll County and remained a part of that county, but, as a municipal corporation, it was given certain special, separate, and distinct powers. The City Charter was repealed and reenacted by chapter 341 of the Acts of 1910.

The citizens of Westminster were conscious of the link between transportation and growth in the town, and as early as 1847, committees began to meet to study the possibility of constructing a rail line through Westminster. Discussions with the Baltimore and Susquehanna Railroad and the strong support of local residents eventually yielded results, and the Western Maryland Railroad was constructed through Westminster in 1861. The expected growth followed, as the railroad increased the ease of passenger travel and transport of goods to Baltimore.

The most recent transportation corridor constructed in the Westminster area was Maryland Route 140, built in 1952 as a bypass for Main Street. As with the previously constructed turnpike and the Western Maryland Railroad, the Maryland Route 140 bypass greatly increased the ease of travel between Westminster and Baltimore and provided the opportunity for significant commercial growth along the Westminster section of Maryland Route 140. This accessibility increased even more with the completion of Interstate Route 795 in 1987 between the Baltimore beltway and Maryland Route 140, north of Reisterstown. As with the construction of Maryland Route 140 in the 1950s, the opening of Interstate 795 allowed residents of Westminster, as well residents to the north, to travel more quickly to employment in the Baltimore area, resulting in new pressure for additional residential and retail growth in the Westminster area.

History of the Comprehensive Plan

The first *Comprehensive Development Plan for Westminster and Vicinity* was written in 1971 as a joint effort by the City of Westminster, Carroll County, and a consulting firm. The preparation of the plan was partially funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The 1971 plan was primarily a land use plan, and the future land use plan was based on existing land uses, existing and proposed roads, water and sewer facilities, and stream conservation. The appendix of the plan included information on the housing situation in Carroll County, as well as goals for achieving adequate housing for all County residents.

The only update of the 1971 plan took place in 1985. The *Comprehensive Plan for Westminster and Environs* was developed by the City of Westminster and Carroll County, and addressed a considerable amount of land outside of the Westminster corporate limits. This plan also focused on land use issues, but included expanded sections that discussed environmental issues, water and sewer facilities, and public services. It also contained a chapter that provided general guidelines for the implementation of the plan.

The 1998 City of Westminster Comprehensive Plan was developed by staff with assistance from an Advisory Committee and certain City Boards and Commissions. Relevant chapters were developed with input from Carroll County staff. The 1998 Plan was developed to address land that is located within the corporate limits of Westminster. The proposed 2004 Westminster and Environs Comprehensive Plan includes the examination of those areas outside of the City boundaries that were previously included in Westminster planning studies. The Westminster and Environs Plan will be developed and approved by County staff and officials.

This Plan is an update of the vision and goals and objectives set forth in the 1998 Plan. While the vision for uniformed growth in Westminster has not changed, the City has undergone changes in its physical boundaries, as well as the policies that implement the goals of the Comprehensive Plan. This update will account for those changes and provide a unified vision for the future of Westminster.

An important goal of the *City of Westminster Comprehensive Plan* is to be truly comprehensive. The revised plan expands on the issues of environmental resources, population, land use, transportation, water and sewer, and community facilities. Plan elements also address housing, economic development, tourism, neighborhood revitalization and historic resources, growth management, and interjurisdictional coordination. In addition, specific goals and objectives are provided to guide City officials and staff in decision-making and in prioritizing work activities. The *City of Westminster Comprehensive Plan* will be reviewed and updated at least every six years, in accordance with Article 66B of the Annotated Code of Maryland, to assure that the Visions for Westminster are achieved and that the changing needs of the community can be met.

Visions

In order to provide for the overall direction of the *City of Westminster Comprehensive Plan*, the City developed the following Vision Statement in 1998 and it still applies today:

The residents of Westminster will experience a high quality of life through the adequate provision of public facilities; well maintained and adequate housing, business facilities, infrastructure and public spaces; a high level of safety throughout the community; and a diversity of jobs, housing, population, and services and commodities. This high quality of life will contribute to an enhanced level of community pride and involvement, resulting in a strong sense of place with respect to the City of Westminster and its citizenry.

This Vision will be accomplished by:

1. Encouraging diversity in population, housing types, employment opportunities, services and commodities, and community organizations, thus providing opportunities for residents to live, work, conduct business, shop, and participate in social activities in their own community;
2. Maintaining and improving existing development, in part through historic preservation;
3. Supporting the revitalization of the downtown commercial district;
4. Demonstrating a high quality of design in new development;
5. Providing better pedestrian access, thus making residents less dependent on motor vehicles;
6. Providing adequate recreation opportunities for residents of all ages;
7. Providing an adequate transportation system that also addresses alternative means of travel;
8. Welcoming new residents and visitors, so that these people share an appreciation for Westminster's heritage;
9. Preserving and restoring natural features; and
10. Addressing potential "pollution" problems, such as lack of safety, excessive noise and light, litter, heavy traffic, homelessness, trespassing, and drug use, as well as air and water pollution.

Additionally, the Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Act of 1992 requires the City of Westminster to adopt eight Visions as part of the Comprehensive Plan. These visions, originally prepared in the wake of the 1987 Chesapeake Bay Agreement, address the impacts of rapid population growth and development on our natural resources, call for an

ethic of environmental stewardship, and promote economic development. Both State and local funding decisions on public construction projects must adhere to the visions.

The eight visions contained in the Planning Act are:

1. Development is concentrated in suitable areas;
2. Sensitive areas are protected;
3. In rural areas, growth is directed to existing population centers and resource areas are protected;
4. Stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay and the land is a universal ethic;
5. Conservation of resources, including a reduction in resource consumption is practiced;
6. To ensure the achievement of Visions 1 through 5, economic growth is encouraged and regulatory mechanisms are streamlined;
7. Adequate public facilities and infrastructure under the control of the county or municipal corporation are available or planned in areas where growth is to occur.
8. Funding mechanisms are addressed to achieve these Visions.

The Smart Growth Areas Act of 1997 designated ‘Priority Funding Areas’ around the State as a regulatory mechanism designed to support the visions listed above. The Act directs State investment in development such as highways, sewer and water construction, economic development assistance, and State leases or construction of new office facilities to areas most suitable for growth. The City of Westminster is designated as a Priority Funding Area under the Act, and the goals, objectives, and recommended actions contained in the Plan have been drafted within this context.

The chapters that follow address all of the key issues in Westminster today, including environmental resources, population, housing, economic development, tourism, neighborhood revitalization and historic resources, land use, transportation, water and sewer, community facilities, growth management, and interjurisdictional coordination. Each chapter includes a description of the existing conditions in the City of Westminster, identifies the areas of concern, and lists a set of goals, objectives, and recommended actions that are guided by the existing conditions and the local and state Visions listed above.

The final chapter, *Plan Implementation*, provides a complete list of all the goals and objectives developed throughout the plan, as well as a series of recommended actions for achieving each objective. The recommended action plan is also outlined at the end of each chapter.